

CONSTRUCTING A WAY TO VICTORY:

The US Interagency Conflict over Reconstruction and Development Operations during Wartime

KIMBER SHEALY

In Herat, Afghanistan, during the late months of 2006, a group of military and civilian workers presented over 12,000 fruit trees to districts in Herat to help the economy and provide an alternative to the illegal opium field farming. The medley of government, military and aid workers operating together under a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) facilitated this donation through the United Nations' Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups. The Afghani local government officials had worked with the PRT and the UN to complete this donation, allowing the Afghani leaders not only to benefit from the economic and agricultural development, but also from playing a direct role with the PRTs to improve their province.¹ Since 2002, PRTs have played a vital role in Iraq and Afghanistan as they perform counterinsurgency (COIN) through development and stability operations, such as working with local councils, providing veterinary and other agriculture and livestock services, building schools and essential infrastructure, and post-war reconstruction. With over fifty active teams, the military has taken on an unprecedentedly large role in stability and reconstruction efforts in these two countries in what many deem a civilian responsibility.² However, with the funding, manpower, mass organizational capabilities and ability to send forces into dangerous areas, the military seems most capable at this time to carry out these operations.³

During a time of war and heavy COIN operations, the military should be heavily involved in reconstruction and stability operations. Civilian organizations that specialize in these areas, though, should play a significant role, receive more funding, and take on an increased share of responsibility in development and stability work in Afghanistan, Iraq and other fragile and failed states.

During the 1990s, the United States dealt with many conflicts throughout the world, such as in Eastern Europe, Somalia, and Haiti. The US government relied heavily on the United States

different organizations, like the State Department (DoS), the US Agency for International Development (USAID), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international financial institutions and the US military competed for different foreign development tasks. This competition created an incredibly inefficient and overlapping system with little structure or cooperation.⁵ Since these operations had become more prevalent in US security initiatives, President Bill Clinton attempted to resolve some of the issues through his Presidential Decision Directive (PDD) 56, The Clinton

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Armed Forces for nation building or reconstruction.⁴ With the ability to react swiftly to natural disasters and the organization and manpower to handle large aid operations, the military is the most capable organization for development, aid and reconstruction missions, to the chagrin of the military's civilian development counterparts. As the role of stability operations grew in importance, not only as a post-conflict but preventative action in fragile states, many advocated for greater civilian involvement and responsibility. During this time many

Administration's Policy on Managing Complex Contingency Operations, in an attempt to create a better system for interagency cooperation, planning and management. Although this PDD proved ineffective in accomplishing most of its objectives, it did contribute to the "unity of effort" problem by bringing

Cadet Kimber Shealy is a History major/Arabic minor in the Class of 2011.

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some of the aforementioned-involved organizations into closer synchronization with each other.⁶ The improved, yet still weak and fragmented management of nation-building operations would soon become even more important with the outbreak of war in Iraq and Afghanistan; however, the weakness of these operations as well as the competition among agencies would be exacerbated.

After 9/11 and the initial conventional war phase and “victory” in Iraq, the military commander and DoS saw the need to rebuild the war-torn urban centers and assist new governments as a way of ensuring that the US left the countries in a condition of relative stability with the potential to prosper. The Senate did not want the traditional, military-led development operations to run this mission in the usual fashion of “cobbled together plans, people and resources in an ad hoc fashion, usually with the Defense Department in the lead.”⁷ The Bush Administration desired civilian workers to rebuild Iraq’s political system, schools, and buildings in a way that would bring the country prosperity while still keeping its cultural identity.⁸

In 2005, President Bush created the National Security Presidential Directive (NSPD) 44, titled Management of Interagency Efforts Concerning Reconstruction and Stabilization Operations to create the Office for the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stability (S/CRS) and shift responsibility of the management of stability and reconstruction efforts to the State Department.⁹ The Department of Defense agreed with this transfer and commented, “Military action alone cannot bring long-term peace and prosperity; therefore, we need to include all elements of national and institutional power.”¹⁰ By providing the mechanism by which these organizations can function and cooperate together, the shared operations will not only relieve stress placed on the military, but also provide a more effective system

for reconstruction and stability in Iraq and Afghanistan.¹¹

Despite a lack of funds and manpower, the S/CRS quickly took off after its creation in 2005. Different from USAID, this new office focused on short-term aid during the beginning transition of failed or fragile countries and the foundation for further development.¹² Active in about thirty countries, but mostly in Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan and Sudan, S/CRS recruits not only DoS employees but an array of agricultural, medical, political and financial specialists to find the best solutions providing improved stability. Needing a diverse group of specialists to choose from when the situation demands led the S/CRS to create the Civilian Response Corps, which takes volunteers from nine US government agencies, all with varying experiences and specialties. Not only does S/CRS pull from these different

As the pendulum swung towards a primarily civilian force in 2005, criticisms of NSPD 44 brought policymakers back to the table. Although civilian workers do play a crucial role in these operations, many DoS and DoD employees believed that the military plays an integral part as well. By having the aforementioned structure and security provided by the military, civilian forces can begin reconstruction and stability operations much sooner after or even during a conflict to prevent further deterioration and to set a good foundation for long-term nation-building.¹⁵ In 2005, the DoD Directive 3000.05, Military Support for Stability, Security, Transition and Reconstruction (SSR) Operations, helped resolve this issue by recognizing that American civilian specialists or foreign professionals will be most effective in completing these operations, while the military will be

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agencies, it also has an active or reserve employee pool, based upon the military’s system of reserve forces who can be called up when needed.¹³

Although the Office for the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stability emphasizes the necessity of civilian employees in these particular missions, it does not discredit the requirement of military forces. In more tumultuous countries, such as Afghanistan, the civilian workers not only need the military for security, but also, the military has provided a system under which the civilians work. This cooperation and “whole-of-government” approach, even if brittle at times, is necessary in most effectively providing reconstruction, stability and development in the most desperate regions.¹⁴

needed in a supporting role to maintain order and provide security when its partners cannot.¹⁶ This relationship between the military and civilians would allow the military personnel to focus on their more traditional operations, while still providing the needed support and reaping the benefits of civilian nation-building and reconstruction.¹⁷ Although Directive 3000.05 set clear directions and had good intentions, the implementation proved difficult due to the slow formations of integral parts and funding for the civilian forces.¹⁸

Many of these initiatives and directives dealt primarily with unifying organizations throughout the US government to address global instability and its threat to US national security. The military supports these initiatives, but adds another reason for reconstruc-

tion and stability efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan: counterinsurgency. In the military's battle against terrorism, counterinsurgency doctrine has quickly become a priority as the enemy, especially in Afghanistan, continues to fight an insurgent war. These untraditional wars have posed a conundrum to the US military and policymakers as they try to formulate the most effective way

governments and councils, education, agriculture and other means of employment. As the US actually provides means for stability in Afghanistan, the people will discard their support for insurgents, allowing victory for the US. Coincidentally, the Taliban has taken on similar strategies recorded in the Code of Conduct for the Mujahidin of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. This

ment provided a strong diplomatic and nation-building expertise. Currently, the civilian component can consist of DoS, USAID, a variety of other US government organizations, NGOs, specialists depending on the area or the need, and indigenous workers.²⁴ The PRTs do not intend to work long-term in Iraq and Afghanistan but aim to provide an immediate response to the destruction and desolation in order to promote stability and prosperity. Kilcullen describes the military's role in development in one of his twenty-eight articles of counterinsurgency: "Most importantly, know that your operations will create temporary breathing space, but long-term development and stabilization by civilian agencies will eventually win the war."²⁵

Differing in size from fifty to three hundred people, the PRTs consist of military support personnel, such as communications, protection, intelligence, or logistics, political advisors, development experts and a variety of other more specific specialists, such as agriculturalists, engineers, or financial advisors. Members that understand the culture and language are one of the most important requirements in these groups, so that the team can successfully help the people in a particular area. In all of the teams' activities, the groups ensure that they have the approval of local leaders and the central government for both coordination and diplomatic considerations.²⁶ As the PRTs grew in popularity, International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) took control of a portion of the PRTs along with the United States.²⁷ International organizations set clearer guidelines for PRTs and improved the relationship between civilian and military forces within the groups. Some of these guidelines gave more of an identity and motivation to PRTs, such as the missions to build provincial capacity, foster economic development, strengthen the rule of law and promote reconciliation. Within the first few years, the results

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to achieve victory. Australian Lieutenant Colonel David Kilcullen describes counterinsurgency as "a competition with the insurgent for the right and the ability to win the hearts, minds and acquiescence of the population."¹⁹ To win the hearts and minds of the Afghani and Iraqi people the US must focus on three categories of effort: governance, development and security. From there the US military can effectively aid the foreign governments and try to provide a stable and potentially prosperous society. Whether a prosperous society comes through construction, education, security, agriculture, or government, the people will respond and side with the group that can most capably meet their needs.²⁰

Focusing on Afghanistan, the most basic way to win the Afghani people over lies with first meeting their most basic needs, such as food, shelter, water and means of making a living. Not only will this provide a more stable country and possibly prevent it from falling into future conflicts, but meeting these needs will begin to persuade the Afghani people and government away from the insurgents. After basic needs are met, the US can then try to meet the needs of the society as whole. This refers to local

code of conduct instructs members to adhere to Islamic principles and work to "win the hearts of Muslims at large."²¹ The competition over who can better persuade the Afghani people continues, but the United States holds a resource that the Taliban does not have access to quite as easily: money. In General Petraeus' speech to counterinsurgency commanders in 2003, Petraeus' claimed, "Money can be ammunition."²²

From the US military's Coalition Humanitarian Liaison Cells that had been in place in 2001, a new unit formed that would attempt to bring together the efforts of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and other NGOs. Officially formed in late 2002, the military dubbed these units as Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), which would potentially create mechanisms to aid their counterinsurgency efforts and to create support for the new central government. First deployed in Afghanistan, the PRTs were formed to coordinate both military and civilian power and capabilities for reconstruction tasks and political and security advisement.²³ The military portion of these teams allowed the groups to venture into more unstable and hazardous areas, while the civilian compo-

and benefits of these teams led other countries to follow the US-lead. By 2005, Britain, Germany, the Dutch, New Zealand and other coalition countries created their own PRTs to use throughout Afghanistan.²⁸ Since then, even more countries have joined this effort, and together have created a robust and diverse reconstruction and stabilization effort.

In Afghanistan, many tribal leaders are especially enthusiastic about the United States' effort to help rebuild their

in different areas. For example, the US and Iraqi leadership have prioritized the need for reconstruction of war torn cities and villages as well as political advisement. All with the intent of creating a more prosperous and stable society to prevent autocratic rule or the growth of terrorism, the US has achieved some great victories in helping the Iraqi people. To combat both the problems of unemployment and the need for reconstruction, the US government created almost 70,000 jobs, many

civilian organizations are needed, and PRTs are the medium for this cooperation to occur. Former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice commented on the effectiveness of the combined military-civilian force in 2007: "The logic behind PRTs is simple. Success in Iraq relies on more than military efforts; it requires robust political and economic progress. Our military operations must be fully supported and integrated with our civilian and diplomatic efforts across the entire US government to help Iraqis clear, hold, and build throughout all of Iraq."³⁴ The division of labor will provide the advantage of different points of view in projects due to the diverse vocations and experience levels of the members of a PRT. Early civilian involvement in stabilization efforts will also provide a better foundation for long lasting development after the US military leaves Iraq and Afghanistan.

Although many praise the Provincial Reconstruction Teams, they also receive large amounts of criticism. From calling them "successful but not sufficient" to harmful and a mere public affairs' stunt, the consistent criticism has forced leaders of the groups to reevaluate their tactics and operations.³⁵ Critics first analyzed the lack of a strategic plan and the reactionary attitude of the PRTs. Without a clear objective or plan, military and civilian leaders have no way of correctly evaluating the teams' performances as successful or unsuccessful. In Afghanistan, lacking an objective has led to inconsistent goals and accomplishments for PRTs. This occurs, for example, when one group believes the most important aspect of its mission is to provide security and prevent attacks within that city, paying little attention to the people, where another group believes that security remains important but secondary to creating relationships with the village leaders and people and attempting to meet their needs.³⁶ Not only do inconsistencies dwell in the

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villages. For example, in 2005, a PRT team met with the village elders a few hours south of Kabul to discuss what the elders believed their village needed. The inclusion of the Afghani government not only allowed the American PRT to better understand what the village desired, but also allowed the elders to feel involved with the reconstruction, which built a sense of pride and allegiance with the Americans. At the end of the meeting, PRT members added that the Afghans were in charge of the reconstruction and the US remained solely to facilitate the process. After the meeting, the two groups agreed to build actual school buildings so that the province will prosper in the future.²⁹ With this development, children would soon be able to attend school again. Other specific projects include repair of infrastructure, irrigation and pipeline construction, medical assistance and agricultural techniques and assistance.³⁰

In Iraq, the mission remains much the same but with a greater emphasis

involving reconstruction and clean up of war debris.³¹ The PRTs also have focused on teaching government employees in Iraq basic business skills and civics to decrease the gap between the minority of highly educated individuals and the rest of the government workers. One of the most impressive and effective aspects of these groups in Iraq is that they do not just give free aid, but mentor Iraqis on setting up budgets to fund their country's own reconstruction.³²

Within the first few years of action, the PRTs have proven themselves successful in multiple ways. First, they provide stability to regions through reconstruction and other aid efforts. These major efforts not only create a more stable country, but allow the people to grow closer to the US, as they see it as best meeting their needs. Secondly, and equally important, the teams are helping resolve the interagency conflict with respect to development and stability projects. In the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, both the military and

American PRTs, but the combination of German, UK and a variety of other coalition PRTs in Afghanistan create even greater ambiguities over what PRTs should be accomplishing and how.³⁷

Along with no clear mission, the coalition PRTs have no unified commander under which they reside. A leader that would oversee these operations in both Afghanistan and Iraq could provide a better and more informed chain-of-command that could address stability and reconstruction doctrinal issues, give the PRTs a cohesive mission, and help with the inconsistencies in operations.

The commander could work with the leaders of similar organizations to ensure that miscommunication is kept to a minimum and that the different development and aid organizations work together in the most advantageous ways for both the coalition and the countries of interest. Also, with a unified PRT

command, the various countries' teams could better coordinate efforts together and disperse ideas with greater ease.³⁸

With a vague mission and no strategic oversight, some PRTs believed that achieving success could be found in building the most buildings or providing the greatest number of services in the shortest amount of time, with little regard to the opinions of the indigenous people. The PRTs not only did this to impress their superiors, but also to quickly impress the local people of Afghanistan and Iraq and prove that the coalition forces came with good intentions. Robert Perito of the US Institute

of Peace commented on the issue saying, "Pressure from senior military authorities to demonstrate progress...resulted in the hasty construction of building without reference to the Afghan government's capacity to support these activities. Schools were built without teachers and clinics without doctors."³⁹ Also, the desire to quickly achieve success had led to some substandard construction of buildings or inadequate understanding of certain projects, such as piping and water distribution. These haphazard projects may achieve temporary success and excite the people of the village; but

act as the main diplomatic representatives on the teams.⁴¹ The Office for the Coordinator of Stability and Reconstruction and its Civilian Response Corps should become more involved with this issue, as its Civilian Response Corps vastly consists of retired diplomats, area and skill experts, linguists, and military members.⁴² Also, the military has also recognized its deficiencies in cultural and language experts, and reemphasized the importance of training more personnel in these specialties. The US Air Force, for example, has more than doubled the amount of its Foreign Area Specialists and Political-Military Specialists.⁴³

Finally, and one of the greatest disparagements of Provincial Reconstruction Teams, people have criticized the mere presence of military members in development, aid and reconstruction activities. The criticism comes mostly from the NGOs that have resided in a region for some time and feel that the military's presence "[blurs] the line between military and humanitarian assistance."⁴⁴ This criticism was especially relevant at the beginning of both Operation Enduring



PRT SUPPORTING FARAH PROVINCE IN AFGHANISTAN

in the end, they harm the indigenous people more than they help as a portion of the buildings and projects fail.

Part of the reason for the aforementioned ineffectiveness or poor quality of reconstruction and stability effort lies with the lack of language, ethnic, political and religious expertise within the PRTs.⁴⁰ This issue has led to many mistakes and taboo behavior within Afghanistan and Iraq that have hindered the American PRTs to make swift strides towards stabilization. For example, the State Department has not prioritized the people it sends to the PRTs leaving many junior Foreign Service Officers to

Freedom and Iraqi Freedom as traditional military operations continued throughout the countries, while at the same time, largely military PRTs attempted to provide aid and assistance while in uniform. The NGOs believed that the PRTs presence and their similar missions endangered the non-military relief workers, since the indigenous people, including some insurgents, might identify the NGO staff with the US military. As the threat of attack increased, especially of less protected people, insurgents began targeting relief workers. After one of its personnel was killed, the renowned Doctors without

Borders left Afghanistan and blamed the PRTs for the increase of attacks on relief workers. In this same sense, civilian workers for development and stability believed that the military uniforms among them on the PRTs compromised the relief workers' mission by making their efforts seem part of a military strategy.⁴⁵

The criticism continues, but during a time of war, as the United States finds itself in currently, the military will continue to play a heavy role in reconstruction. However, this does not mean that civilian workers should not be heavily involved as well. In 1967, the military created a similar group to the Provincial Reconstruction Team called the Civil Operations and Rural Development Support (CORDS). This group united both civilian and military personnel to provide security for the people, persuade the people of the superiority of South Vietnam and target the insurgents' infrastructure.⁴⁶ Before they came together, the different groups, including the military, were ineffective in providing humanitarian aid and means of development on their own. PRT commanders should examine many of this program's characteristics, as the lessons learned therefrom may make the current teams more effective and provide understanding to the civilian personnel within PRTs. For example, CORDS had an agreed upon and clear objective, which allowed greater "unity of effort" among the different organizations and groups. Writing on the strategy used, Dale Andrade claims, "Key to the entire strategy is the integration of all efforts towards a single goal."⁴⁷ Moreover, the US military funded the Vietnam war-time reconstruction and development groups, placing them within the military chain of command, yet the groups consisted of primarily civilian workers.⁴⁸ The Department of Defense recognized the benefits of this program and CORDS received over 7,600 advisors by 1969,

and just under \$1.5 billion dollars of support for its mission.⁴⁹ With CORDS falling under the purview of the military, it had the money, manpower, structure and ability to travel throughout South Vietnam, which allowed it to provide mass amounts of aid and reconstruction in more isolated regions.⁵⁰ Looking at the situation in Afghanistan and Iraq, the PRTs should attempt to replicate CORDS functions. Although the wars cannot perfectly be compared, the long and painful lessons of Vietnam may provide additional guidance for counterinsurgency strategies in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In the current state of war, the US military's mission and command take immediate precedence. If the US can provide security, attack insurgent infrastructure and win over the non-insurgent citizens, then the US can look towards achieving military success in Afghanistan and Iraq. With this said, the military must also understand the long term role and immediate benefits of other organizations and civilian advisors in reconstruction, stability and counterinsurgency missions and work with them to achieve those advantages. Once the war has ended, US Armed Forces should shift responsibility of development and stability operations back over to the civilian organizations, while still keeping minimal forces present for security reasons. Also, the civilian organizations that would take this responsibility must have the training, knowledge, and experience necessary to successfully complete development operations. Interagency competition and conflict will continue, but an ability to recognize what is in the best interest of the United States and the countries of interest remains crucial. Whether in wartime or peace time, American agencies must continue fervently discussing possible solutions, recognizing others' expertise, and working together.

NOTES

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**Knowledge is indivisible.
When people grow wise in
one direction, they are sure to
make it easier for themselves
to grow wise in other
directions as well.
-- Isaac Asimov**